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Runeberg, Johan Ludvig

✓
Christmas Eve;
OR,
The Angel Guest.

From the Swedish.

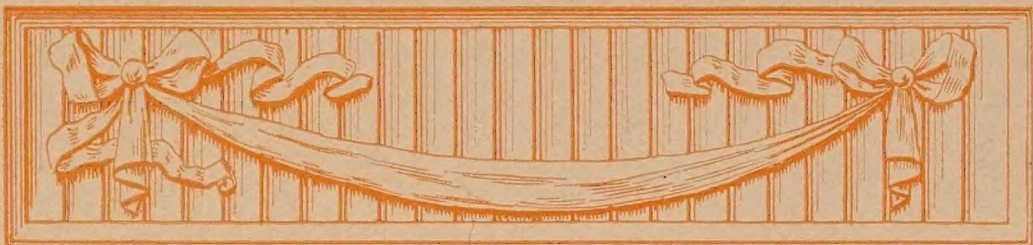
By Mrs. Eric Baker

New-York:
Geo. R. Lockwood & Son,
812 Broadway.

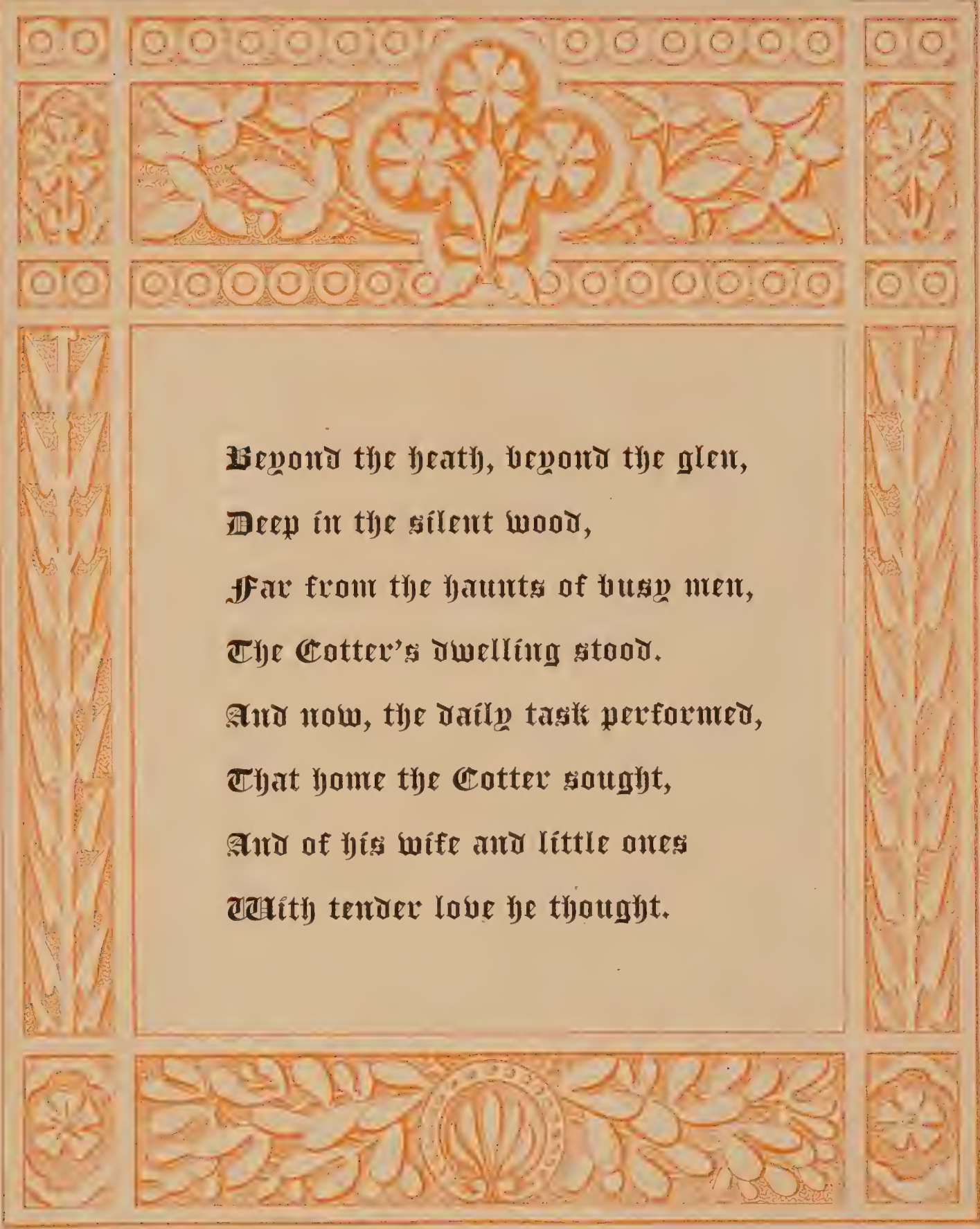


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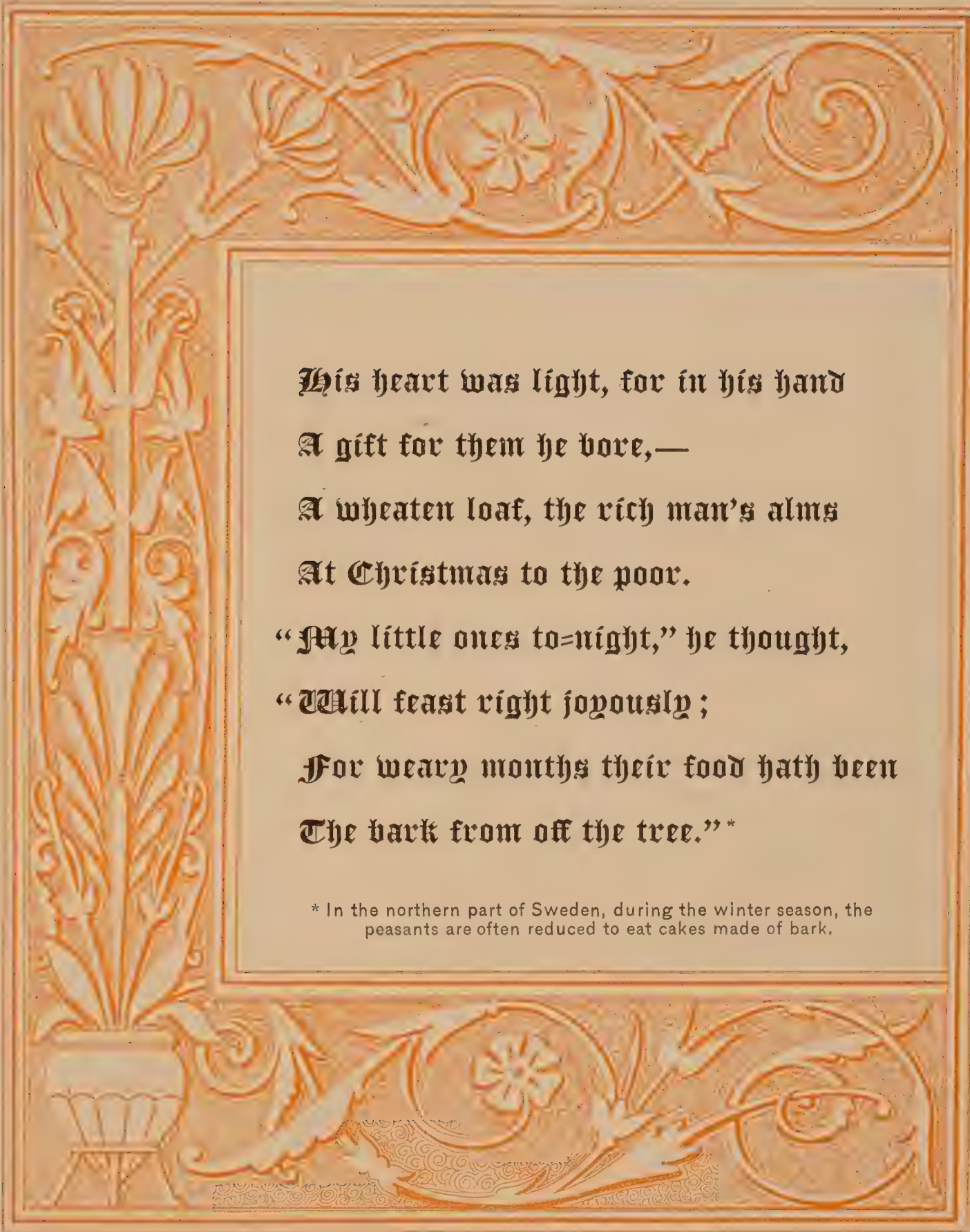
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The silver moonbeams faintly shed
A flickering light around,
The keen wind blew, the silent snow
Fell on the ice-bound ground.
The hungry wolf had sought his den,
The lynx his lonely lair;
The village watch-dog's bark alone
Rang on the frosty air.



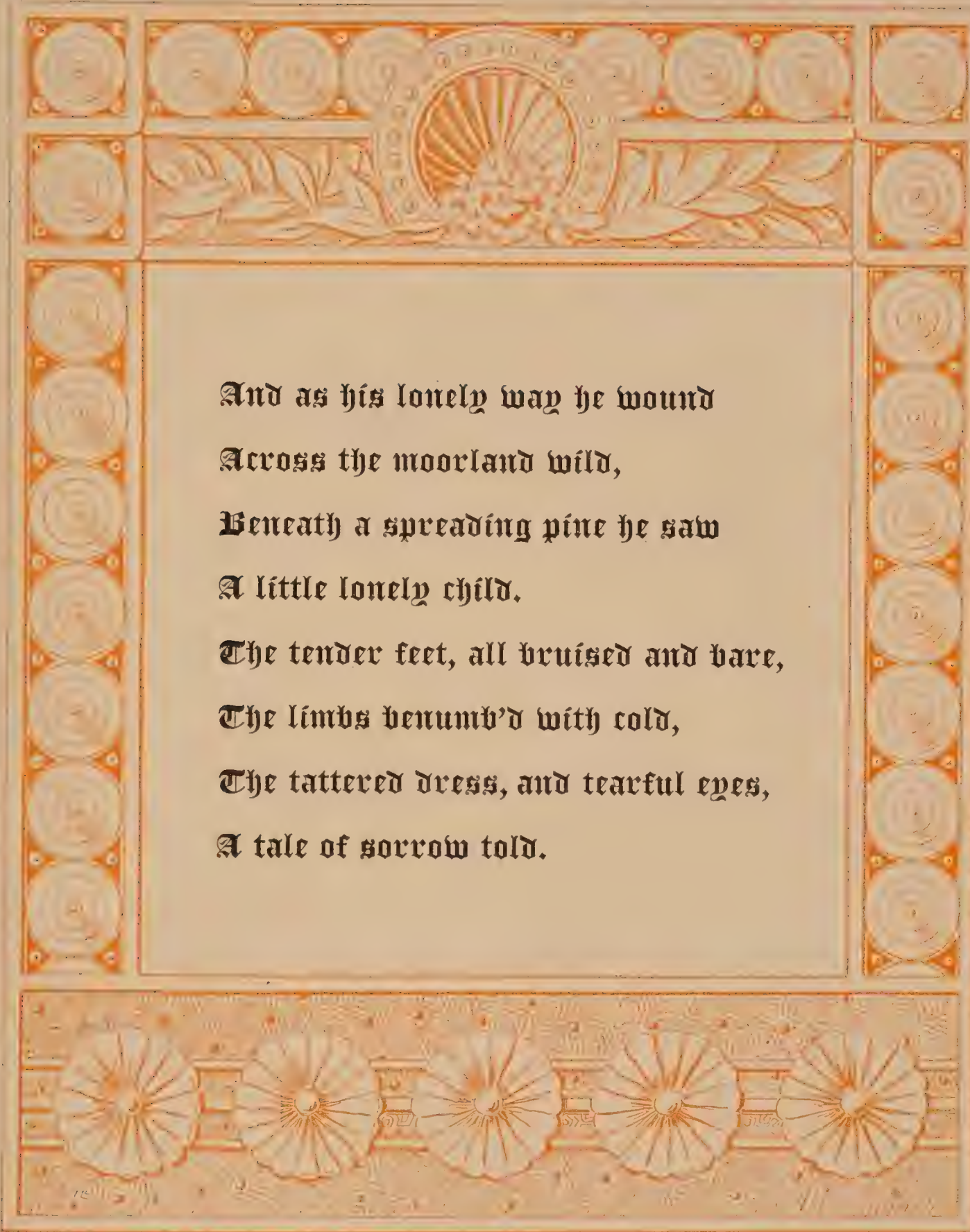
Beyond the heath, beyond the glen,
Deep in the silent wood,
Far from the haunts of busy men,
The Cotter's dwelling stood.
And now, the daily task performed,
That home the Cotter sought,
And of his wife and little ones
With tender love he thought.



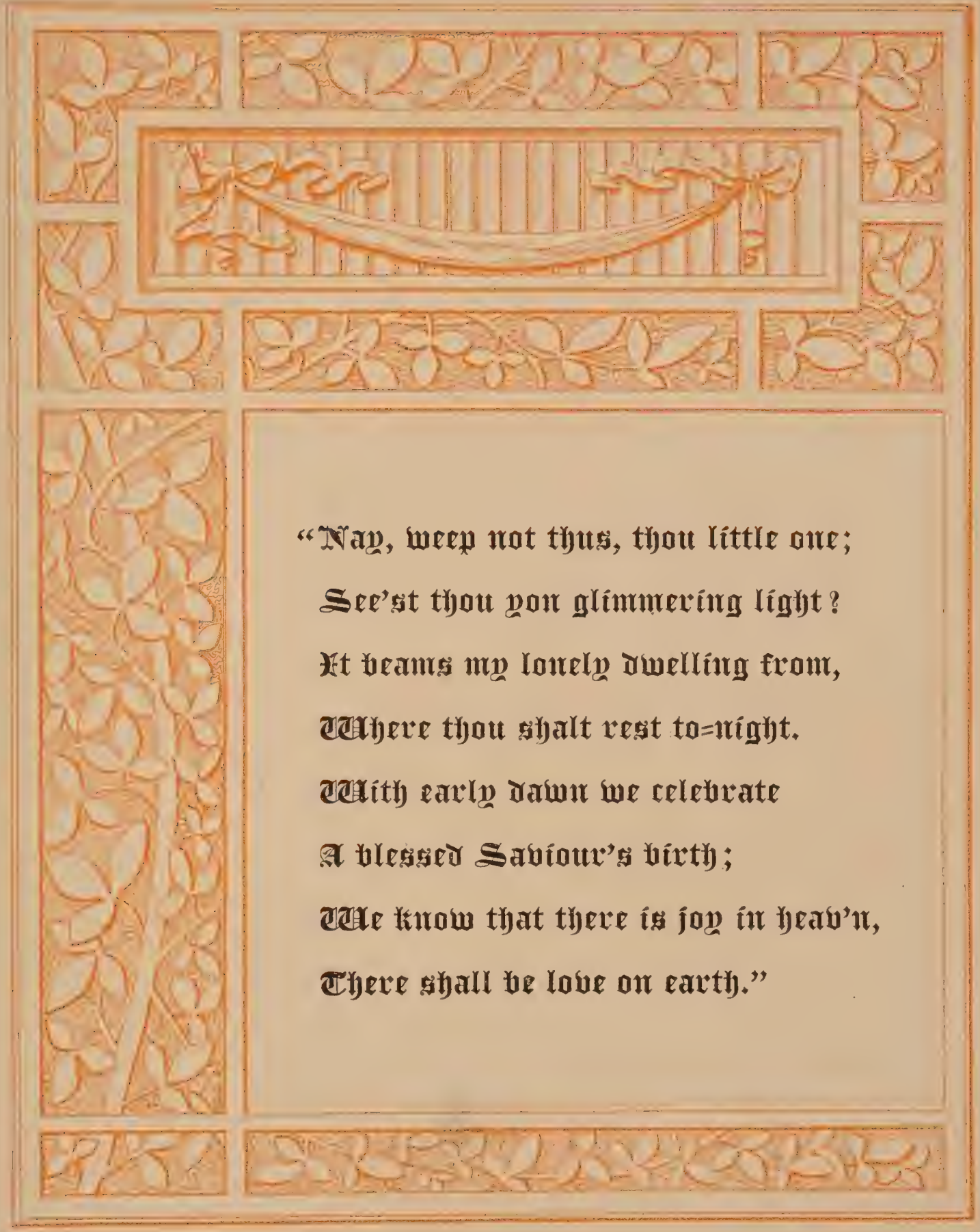
His heart was light, for in his hand
A gift for them he bore,—
A wheaten loaf, the rich man's alms
At Christmas to the poor.

“My little ones to-night,” he thought,
“Will feast right joyously ;
For weary months their food hath been
The bark from off the tree.” *

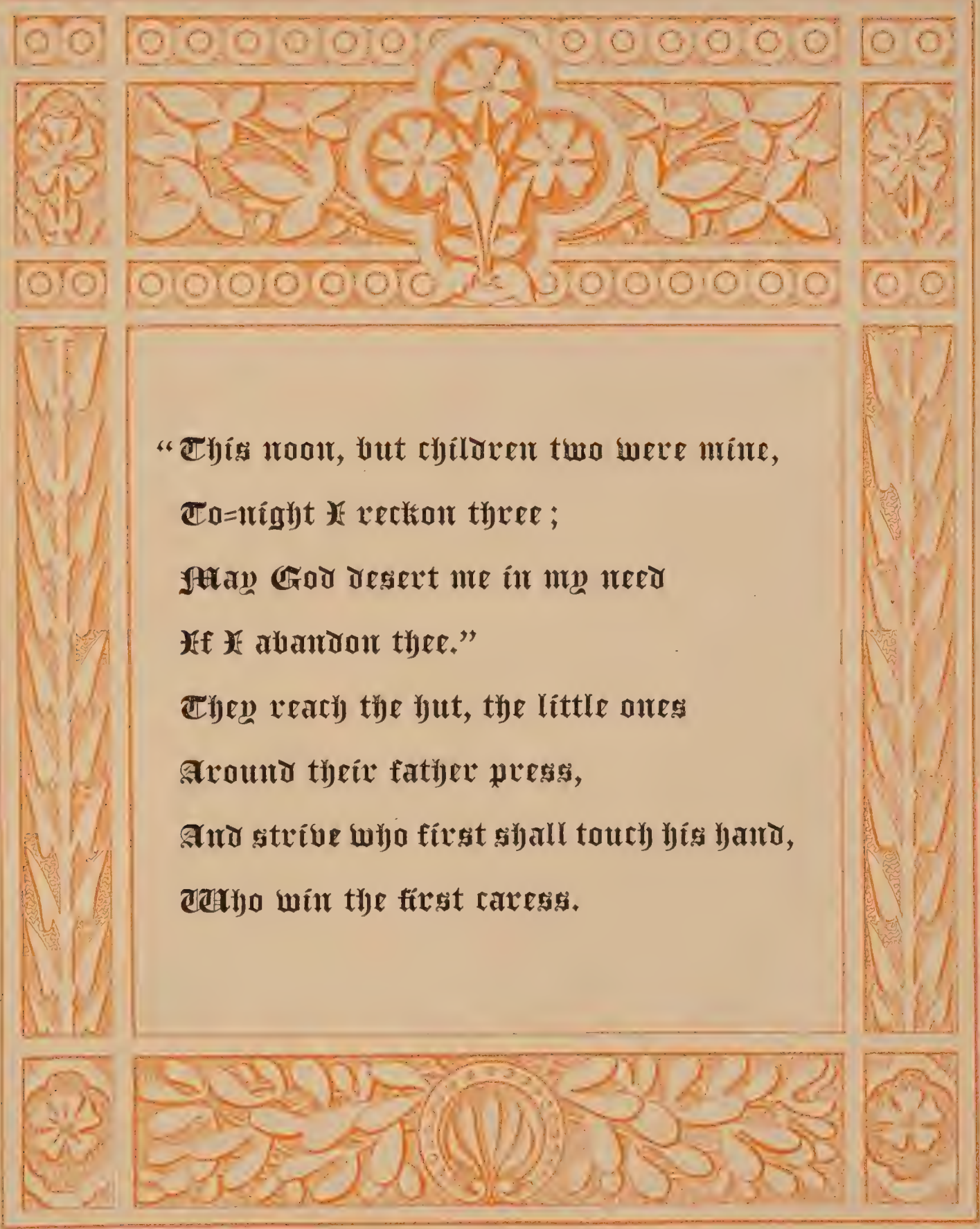
* In the northern part of Sweden, during the winter season, the peasants are often reduced to eat cakes made of bark.



And as his lonely way he wound
Across the moorland wild,
Beneath a spreading pine he saw
A little lonely child.
The tender feet, all bruised and bare,
The limbs benumb'd with cold,
The tattered dress, and tearful eyes,
A tale of sorrow told.

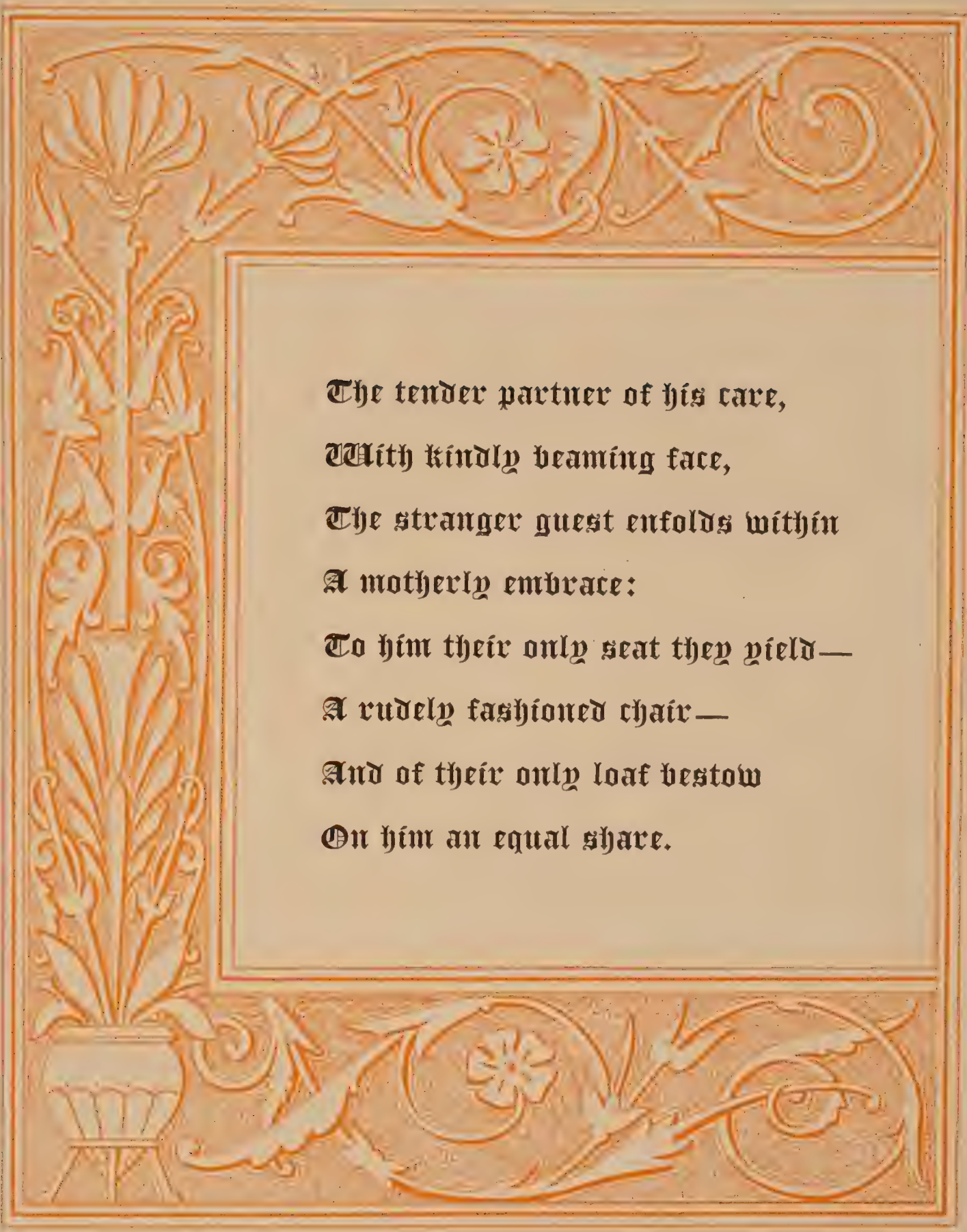


“Nay, weep not thus, thou little one;
See'st thou yon glimmering light?
It beams my lonely dwelling from,
Where thou shalt rest to-night.
With early dawn we celebrate
A blessed Saviour's birth;
We know that there is joy in heav'n,
There shall be love on earth.”

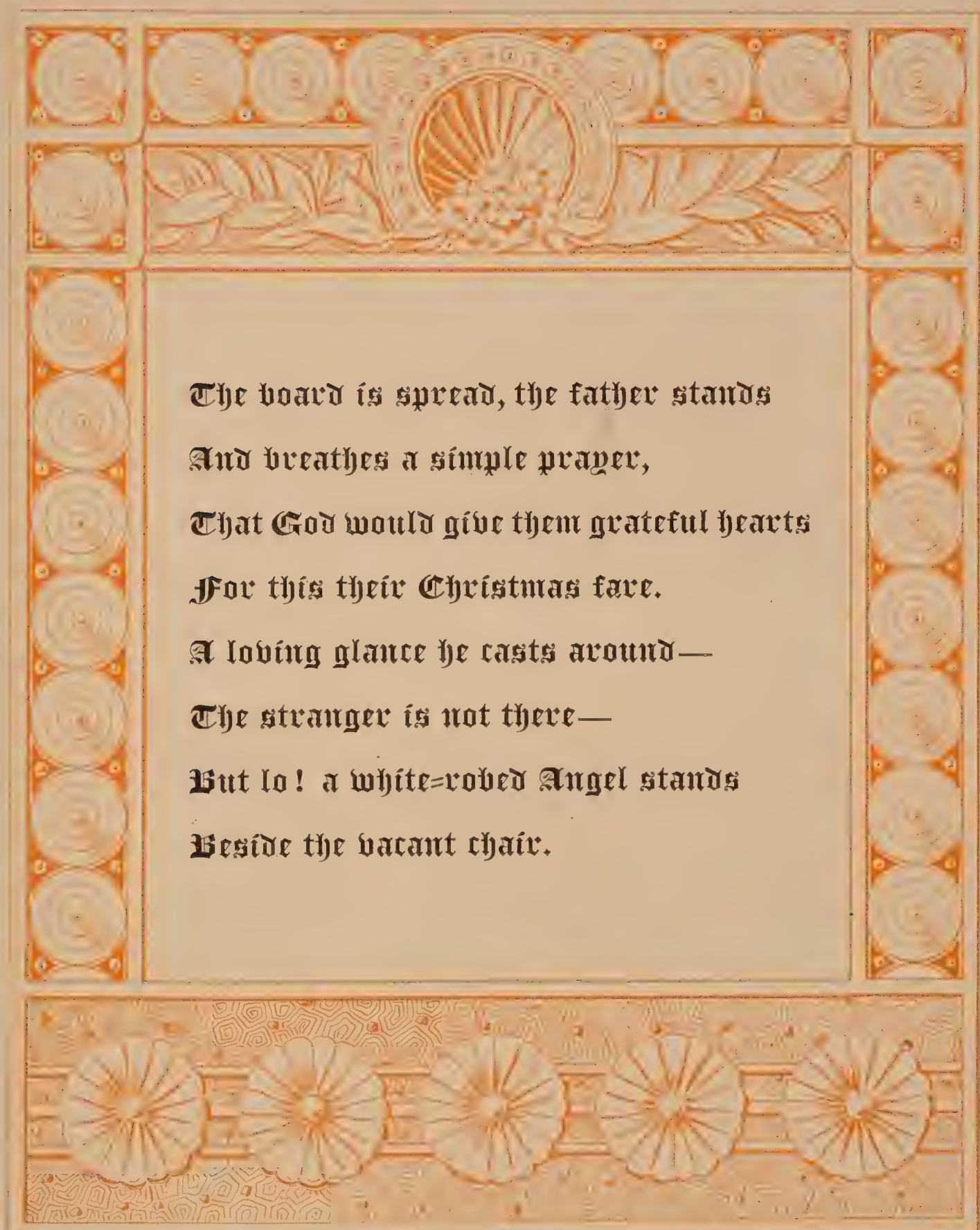


“This noon, but children two were mine,
To-night I reckon three ;
May God desert me in my need
If I abandon thee.”

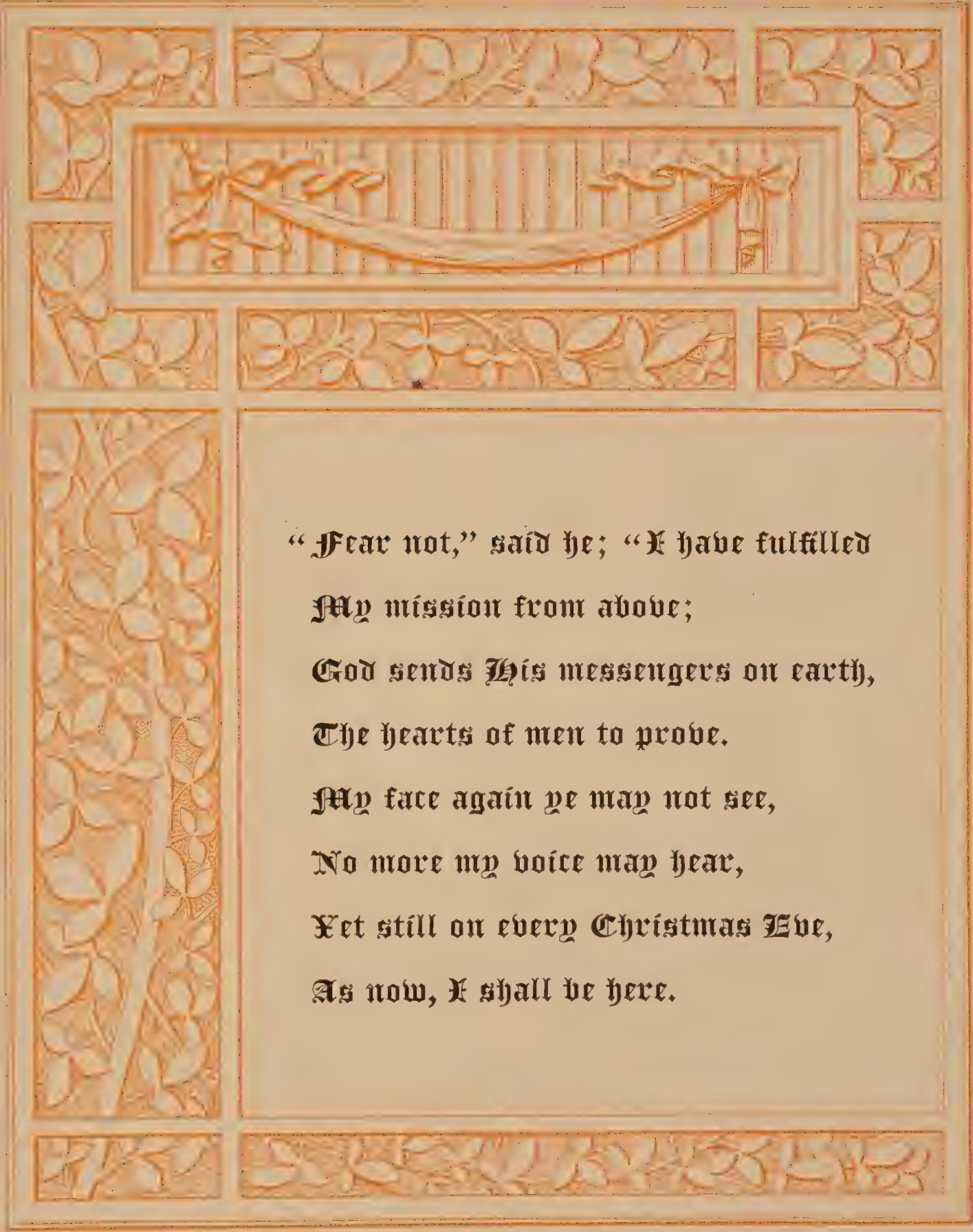
They reach the hut, the little ones
Around their father press,
And strive who first shall touch his hand,
Who win the first caress.



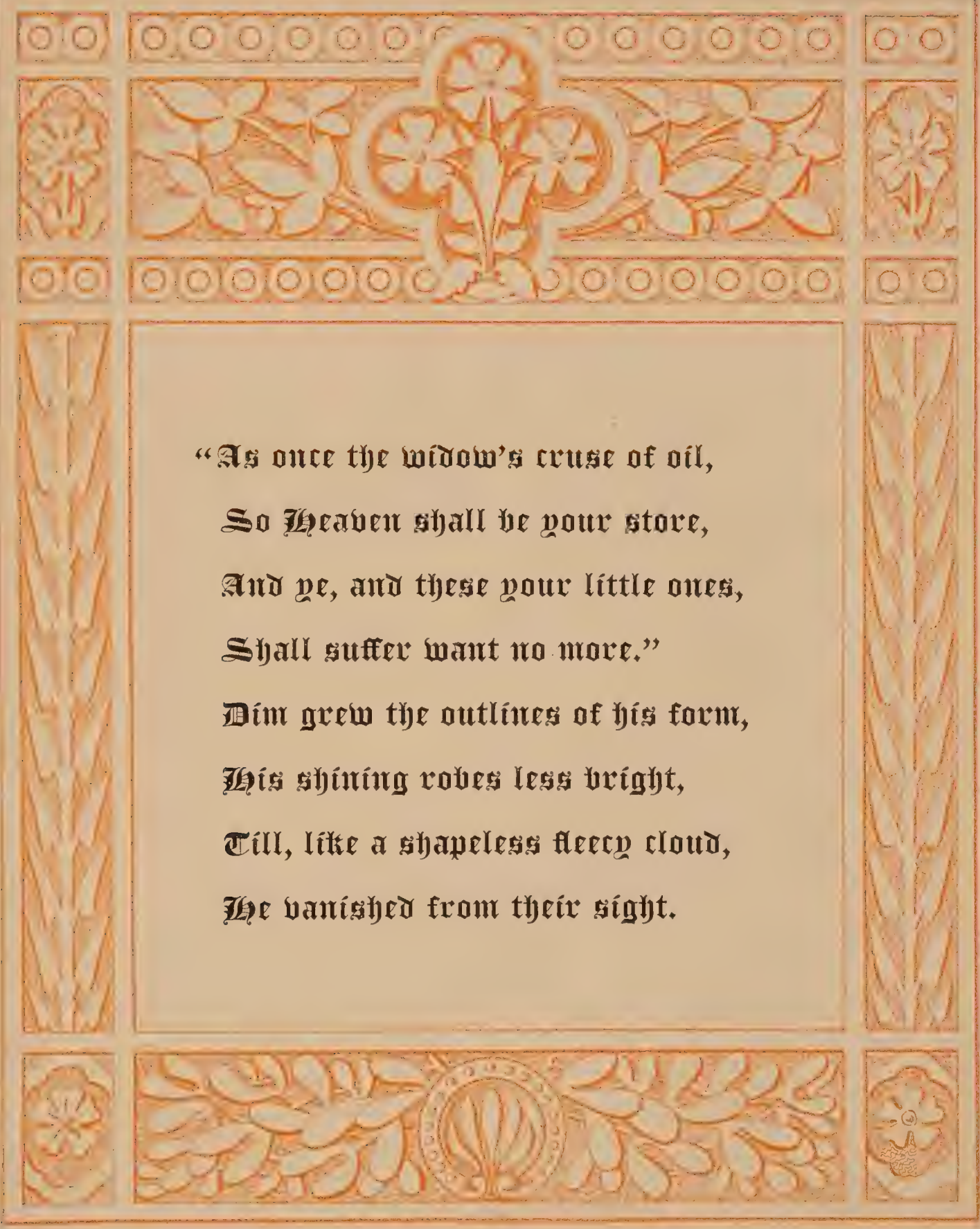
The tender partner of his care,
With kindly beaming face,
The stranger guest enfolds within
A motherly embrace:
To him their only seat they yield—
A rudely fashioned chair—
And of their only loaf bestow
On him an equal share.



The board is spread, the father stands
And breathes a simple prayer,
That God would give them grateful hearts
For this their Christmas fare.
A loving glance he casts around—
The stranger is not there—
But lo! a white-robed Angel stands
Beside the vacant chair.

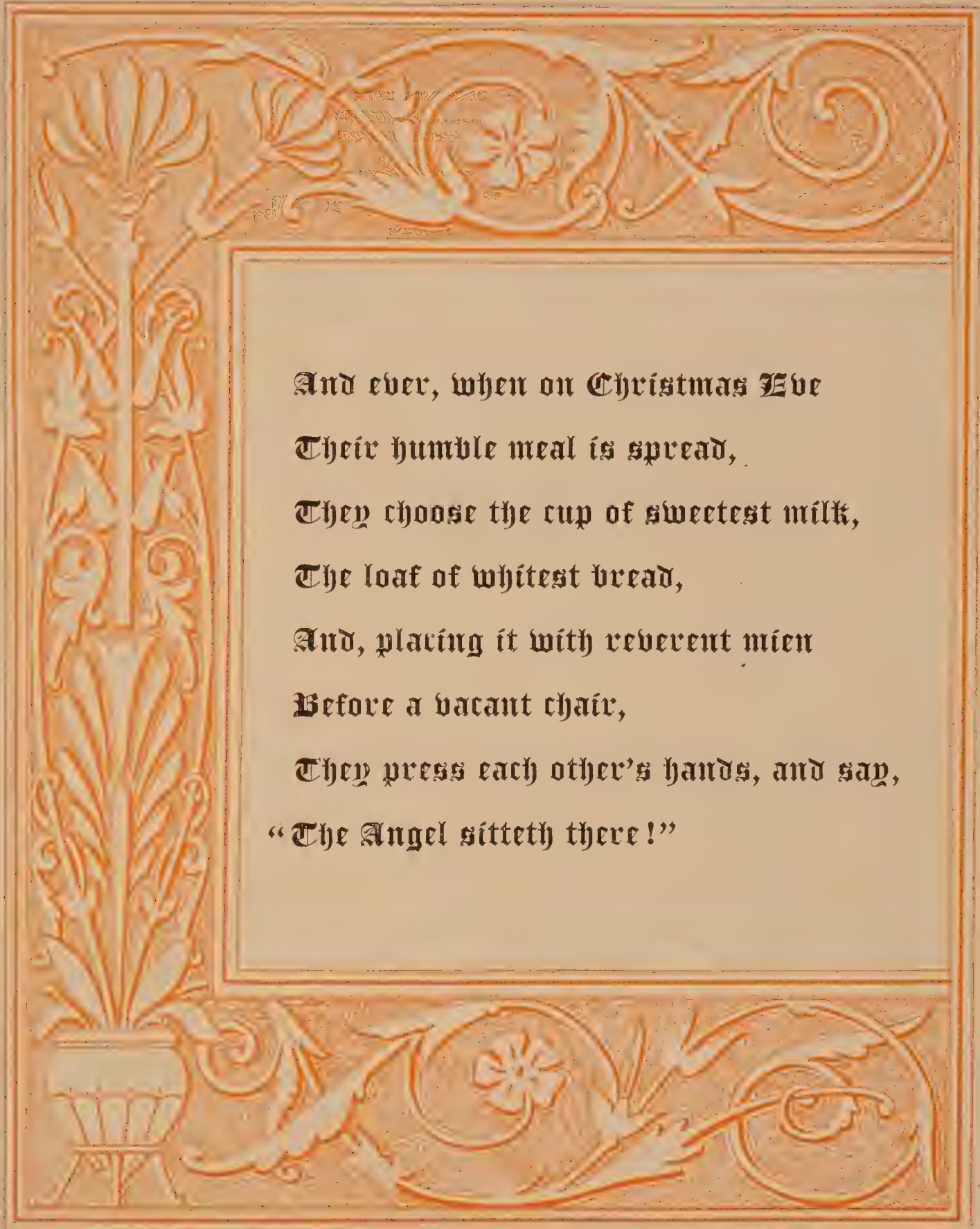


“Fear not,” said he; “I have fulfilled
My mission from above;
God sends His messengers on earth,
The hearts of men to probe.
My face again ye may not see,
No more my voice may hear,
Yet still on every Christmas Eve,
As now, I shall be here.



“As once the widow’s cruse of oil,
So Heaven shall be your store,
And ye, and these your little ones,
Shall suffer want no more.”

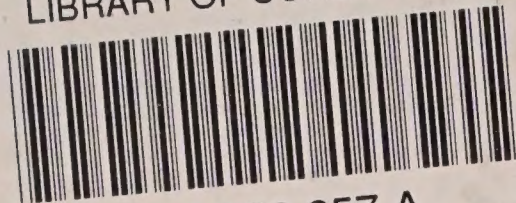
Dim grew the outlines of his form,
His shining robes less bright,
Till, like a shapeless fleecy cloud,
He vanished from their sight.



And eber, when on Christmas Eve
Their humble meal is spread,
They choose the cup of sweetest milk,
The loaf of whitest bread,
And, placing it with reverent mien
Before a vacant chair,
They press each other's hands, and say,
"The Angel sitteth there!"



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